



THE CENTER FOR
NURSING ADVOCACY
Increasing public understanding of nursing

203 Churchwardens Rd.
Baltimore, MD USA 21212
office 1.410.323.1100
fax 1.443.705.0260
info@nursingadvocacy.org
www.nursingadvocacy.org

BOARD

Chair: Bernice Buresh, Journalist

Vice Chair: Andrea Brassard, RN, DNSc,
MPH, CRNP

Treasurer: Will Doyle, MPH, MBA

Secretary: Marty Lanus

DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE:

Anita Bamford, RN, DNurs, MA, Dip Bus

Mary Chaffee, RN, ScD(h), MS, CNAA,
FAAN

Mary Dominiak, RN, PhD, MBA

I. Alan Fein, MD, MPH

Art Engler, RNC, DNSc, APRN

Suzanne Gordon, Journalist

Beatrice Kalisch, RN, PhD, FAAN

Kathleen McCarthy, RN, BSN

Lucille McCarthy, PhD

Shannon McClellan, JD

Morris Magnan, RN, PhD

Cassandra Okechukwu, RN, MSN, MPH

Linda C. Pugh, RNC, PhD, FAAN

Georgia Peirce, BA

Mitra Rangarajan, RN, BSN, MPH, MS,
DBA, BSc,

Anne-Marie Scully, RN, MSN

Karen J. Stanley, RN, MSN, AOCN,
FAAN

Pierre-André Wagner, RN, LLM, BA

Pat Woods, RN, MScN

ADVISORY PANEL

Claire Fagin, RN, PhD, FAAN

Diana Mason, RN, PhD, FAAN

Pam Maraldo, RN, PhD

Bobbi Kimball, RN, MBA

Lisa Negstad, MBA

Kate Pipkin

David Schildmeier

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Sandy Summers, RN, MSN, MPH

June 12, 2007

Stephanie Miller
Stephanie Miller Show
PO Box 93563
Los Angeles, CA, 90093

Dear Ms. Miller:

I am writing regarding your June 1, 2007 show where you and Mr. Jim Ward discussed the immigration legislation pending in Congress. One caller suggested that a provision easing restrictions on the entry of foreign nurses would undermine unions. You linked this to how "the middle American worker in America is getting squeezed." But you could not resist several gratuitous "naughty nurse" remarks. One comment about "naughty Scandinavian nurses" managed to suggest that those nurses are sluts *and* trivialized the real issues related to the growing migration of nurses from poor nations to developed ones, which has devastated fragile health systems in the poor nations. I am urging you to avoid reinforcing tired stereotypes that are a key factor in why millions of nurses--and their patients--are "getting squeezed." And I would like to request that you have me on your show in the near future to discuss these issues that are vital to public health.

You and Mr. Ward were discussing the immigration bill when a caller, "Susan in Oregon," suggested that one provision would permit the entry of "an almost unlimited amount of foreign nurses thereby effectively breaking the nurses unions." You responded, in part:

It's a good argument, obviously the middle American worker in America is getting squeezed in a lot of ways. And Jim will not be happy if a lot of naughty foreign nurses get in.

Mr. Ward at first seemed to resist getting into the naughty nurse angle, noting that the bill was a "big old crap fest." But then the following exchange ensued:

Ward: Naughty nurses by the boatload.

Miller: (with sound effect of a whip cracking) Jim cannot...no. We must stop the naughty Scandinavian nurses (whip cracking), porn nurse[s] from infiltrating America. (whip cracking)

Ward: And French maids. Mmm-hmm.

Because neither the caller's remarks nor the underlying legislation had anything to do with the "naughty nurse," throwing that in seemed to be the result of the hosts having nothing relevant to say. The fact that you and Mr. Ward were also playing with the stereotype, as the reference to the comparable French maid image confirms, does not reduce its impact. Maybe we're not supposed to think Mr. Ward is really into naughty porn nurses, but the apparent irony does not extend to the [naughty nurse stereotype](#) itself; that seems to be an unquestioned staple of the mainstream media. No one is going to think this is a criticism of the stereotype. Like the sound of the whip, it's simply another stock effect to brought out when it's time for a cheap laugh.

Consider the difference had you said something like this:

Why are we even looking for more real nurses? It's not like health care actually matters to us--one sixth of our people don't even have health insurance! So why not just save a lot of trouble and get "naughty nurses" from the porn industry? You'd be just as dead as with no nurse, but what a way to go! You'd like that, wouldn't you, Jim? Get porno nurses to watch all those pretty colors move on your ICU monitors! Pretty!

That might be no more clever than what you said, but at least it would not trivialize the nursing shortage or what nurses do. Rather than suggest that nursing is an inconsequential punch line, it would link real nurses to good care, and distinguish them from the unskilled stereotype.

And speaking of the unskilled nurse stereotype, we understand that you have some personal experience with it. You told one 2007 interviewer that you had once appeared as a nurse on ABC's long-running soap opera "General Hospital." You said that you had just one line:

Here's the files!

That is a perfect summation of how nurses are treated in the vast majority of the [U.S. entertainment media](#), and it is a vision that fits well with the one you presented on your radio show. We feel confident that naughty porno nurses are capable of getting you the files.

Of course, the generic naughty nurse image, even though a "joke," tends to reinforce the enduring stereotype that nurses are brainless bimbos whose work does not call for much respect. This undermines nurses' claims to adequate resources during the worst shortage in history, an enormous global public health crisis. In reality, nurses are college-educated professionals who use their advanced skills to save lives and improve outcomes every day.

But you did not stop there. You also linked the profession to stereotypes involving pornography, Scandinavians, and sadomasochism (the whip). This reinforces Nordic bimbo imagery (e.g., the [Swedish bikini team](#)), and it also trivializes the immigration issue. It suggests that is really

just about people coming to the U.S. from other wealthy nations. Maybe they just want to see the world! Of course, the [vast majority](#) of nurse immigrants to the U.S. and other wealthy nations come from developing nations in Asia and Africa. They are not here because the U.S. provides greater opportunities to make bondage films. They are here because they can make many times more money as nurses in the U.S. than in their home countries. Indeed, some people in the Philippines enter nursing with the express purpose of coming to the U.S.

The effects of this migration are mixed at best. Developing nations receive substantial foreign remittances from their overseas workers. But their departure also drains the local health systems of many of their most skilled workers, adding to health crises around the world. The effect on the destination nations is also mixed. Of course the nurse immigrants address the critical shortages in these nations. But questions have been raised about the effect on nursing as a profession. For instance, it may be difficult for recent immigrants, from different cultures, to advocate effectively, particularly when the clinical setting is so troubled to begin with.

Will the entry of foreign nurses "break" nurses' unions in the U.S., as Susan from Oregon suggested? Less empowered people may be less likely to join and support unions. And of course a system that essentially pushed out current union members and added new ones would at a minimum force the unions to expend significant resources in constant recruiting. On the other hand, fewer than 20% of U.S. nurses are unionized today, and some of the foreign nurses may actually come from nations with higher rates of nurse unionization.

We hope that you will try not to reinforce damaging workplace stereotypes in the future.

And I again encourage you to consider having me on your show in the near future to discuss these issues with your listeners. Thank you.

Yours truly,

Sandy Summers, RN, MSN, MPH
Executive Director
ssummers@nursingadvocacy.org
410-323-1100

The Center for Nursing Advocacy seeks to increase public understanding of the central, front-line role nurses play in modern health care. The focus of the Center is to promote more accurate, balanced and frequent media portrayals of nurses and increase the media's use of nurses as expert sources. The Center's ultimate goal is to foster growth in the size and diversity of the nursing profession at a time of critical shortage, strengthen nursing practice, teaching and research, and improve the health care system.